

The Impact of National Policies on Traditional Community Forestry: Forest Proprietorship and Management in Chetan Community, Mazandran, Iran

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Accepted: 26 November 2009 / Published online: 16 January 2010
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Abstract This paper traces the evolution of forest management around Chetan village in the northern part of the Elburz Mountains of north Iran, an area of broadleaved temperate forest in the Caspian region, during three distinct time periods. Since the 18th century the forest, pasture and agricultural land were administered under common rights, with a clear financial relationship between descendants of the dominant family and other families, until the constitutional revolution of 1906. Some decades of instability preceded establishment of various regulated and non-regulated orders by new powers. Finally, the *Forest Nationalization Law 1963* established new institutions that continue today with some small variations, the government now being the main policy and decision-maker. The paper highlights the differences between the three periods; the third one expresses the impact of national policy on forest proprietorship and management at the village level and the interruption of traditional and transitional processes of management.

Keywords Caspian forest · Endowment · Historical context · New institutions · Land tenure · Hyrcanian forest · Local scale

Introduction

The study of land proprietorship and its relation with land management and the impacts of national and global policy on them have improved land policy-

This paper was originally presented at the IUFRO International Symposium on Small-scale Rural Forest Use and Management: Global Policies versus Local Knowledge, held in Gérardmer, France, 23–27 June, 2008.

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formulation systems, allowing policy-makers to design and implement new policies (Marey-Perez and Rodriguez-Vicente 2008). On the other hand, in formulating and analyzing forest policy and future actions it is important to review past events and laws (Scotti and Cadoni 2007; Muhammed et al. 2008). Such studies help to document spatial and temporal changes in social and economic conditions at local, regional, national and international scales and examine their effect on forest management.

Ownership is central to sociological analysis of rural social change, because the ability to benefit from property is at the core of relationships that influence entitlements and responsibilities in community life (Varghese et al. 2006). Rose (1994, cited in Varghese et al. 2006) asserted that most contemporary discussions of ownership overlook the historical evolution of property as a set of claims and obligations people have vis-à-vis other people. Scotti and Cadoni (2007) connected historical analysis of forests and pastures with sustainable development. They believed sustainable development projects that concern common forests need to pay specific attention to local historical analyses since all main components of sustainability—ecological, economic and socio-cultural—are affected by events over time. Based on this premise, they studied common use of forest and pasture at local scale in a village of Italy. They explained changes over time in use of forest and pasture including gathering firewood, making charcoal and grazing. These authors emphasized that this historical study helped both policy-makers and managers to meet sustainable development objectives. Elbakidze and Angelstam (2007) identified five phases over time in the Ukraine Carpathian forest. They introduced emancipation of serfs in 1848, occupation by Soviet Union in 1939 and collapse of the Soviet Union of 1991 as turning points. They concluded that the recent situation of the area studied is a return to the traditional land-use system, especially in forest-dependent communities.

Historically, Iran has experienced various modes of management of forest and rangeland in rural and nomadic regions. These managements were applied by landlords, local chiefs and rural families. The central government had general supervision via local authorities. Also several kinds of land and natural resource ownerships have existed, including state land, crown land, endowment, landlord and local chief ownership (Lambton 1998). The dynamics of ownership in Iran was related to general changes of society and the Iranian revolution; in this context, five stages of change and transformations in management of rural area of Iran were identified by Taleb (1997), namely: before the constitutional revolution; from constitutional revolution to World War 2; from World War 2 to land reform; from land reform to the Islamic revolution; and after the Islamic revolution. Taleb analyzed the method of rural administration, source of power, role of villagers in rural management, and objective of management, in every stage. After the constitutional revolution in 1906 and establishment of modern government, the influence of government increased gradually; the old orders were in crises and there were disturbances related to intervention of the various services of government and application of the acts of parliament. In some cases the government's delegates attempted to exploit this situation to consolidate their personal and familial powers. In 1963, under the Shah's reforms (called the

White Revolution),¹ there was agrarian reform and forest and range nationalization, so the old management and tenure system crumbled with the new order gradually establishing. The situation has continued with the Islamic Revolution of 1979 through to today (Azkia 1995).

Due to inadequate historical information about forest proprietorship and management in Iran, studies are required to explain the historical context of present management and conflicts between government and local stakeholders. This paper examines several kinds of proprietorship of land at a local scale during three centuries, and the impact of various disruption forces upon it. The process of local management is examined within Chetan, a village in the Caspian forest. Traditional management and ownership continued until about 1916, then the crises in established order was initiated with interventions by commandants, government delegates and the royal family, and finally a fundamental change created the new order in 1963. The main questions examined in this research are:

- (1) What was the traditional land ownership system in Chetan as a mountain village of Hyrcanian forests?
- (2) When did the external power disrupt this traditional ownership and entitlement?
- (3) What are the impacts of national policies in a broad sense on the local ownership and management?

The key issue examined here is not the different phases of forest ownership and administrative management, but the changes and evolutions in national policies, especially in recent decades.

The Northern Forests of Iran (NFI), also named as Caspian or Hyrcanian forests, unlike the arid to semi-arid landscape throughout most of Iran, are closed-canopy deciduous forests. They cover the northern slope of the Elburz Mountain with 800 km length and 20–70 km width. The annual growth of the forests differs depending on tree species, site, age and density, and ranges from 2 to 8 m³/ha per year (Amirnejad et al. 2006). These forests extend from sea level to 2,500 masl and mainly consist of mixed hardwood species including beech, maple, oak, hornbeam, ash, elm and alder, with alpine pastures up to 3,500 masl which is the average height of mountains in this part of Elburz (Sagheb-Talebi et al. 2004). More than 80 tree and 50 shrub species are recognized in the NFI. The forest area was estimated to be 3.4 M ha in the past; today, however, it is only 1.9 M ha (Marvie Mohajer 2005; Amirnejad et al. 2006; Food and agriculture organization of the United Nations 2006). These forests are located in the provinces of Gilan, Mazandaran and Golestan with a total area of 6.2 M ha, populated by 7 M people (Statistical Centre of Iran 2006).

The greatest uses of Caspian forest until the mid-twentieth century were supplying local requirements for grazing domestic animals and providing wood for construction of houses, fuelwood and charcoal making, wood for agricultural needs, and gathering non-timber forest products. All of these services were

¹ Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919–1980) was king of Iran and the second in the Pahlavi dynasty from 1941 until his overthrow in the Iranian revolution of 1979. His White Revolution included nationalizing natural resources and reforms to the traditional style of land management in Iran.

utilized at a local level for the subsistence economy. In the last days of the Qajarie dynasty (1880s), as a result of high demand of European industry for wood from Iranian forests—including Caspian box, Persian walnut, graveyard cypress, and oak—the concession of harvesting of these species in the Caspian plain, in return of some money to the royal treasury of Iran, was given to foreign entrepreneurs including Kuis and Tofilactus from Russia and Erdinrugas from Greece (Javanshir 1999).

Forestry in Iran has a relatively long history of about 90 years. Forest management runs on the basis of regulations and the plans have to be approved by the Forest, Range and Watershed Management Organization (FRWO) of Iran. Natural resources, including forests, have been nationalized in Iran, in 1963, and the FRWO is responsible for them. This organization tries to establish new methods of forest management. Adoption of a forest management plan in Iran has a history of 50 years, which is short in comparison to experienced countries having at least 200 years of relevant practices (Amirnejad et al. 2006). Since the 1950s when the modern management of Caspian forests was established, traditional animal grazing has become a problem in relation to forest management. It was a lesson learned from the west European school of forestry that animal grazing is not compatible with wood harvesting (Shamekhi 2004).

The Research Site and Livelihood Situation of Chetan Village

Chetan village is situated at elevation of 1,650 masl among the temperate forest of the Elburz Mountains, near the southern part of the Caspian Sea, Nowshahr County, Mazandaran province in northern Iran (Fig. 1). The forests, around the village, are mainly coppices which were cut over many years for making charcoal and firewood. The average annual rainfall is 1,200–1,300 mm, which falls mainly in winter, autumn and spring. Chetan village is situated in a valley between 1,600 and 1,680 masl, and the communal land is between 1,450 and 3,360 masl. It has 279 ha of agricultural land, 2,237 ha of forests and 906 ha of pasture. The village has 148 permanent household with 725 members, as well as 75 families with 373 members who reside in the village in summer. An old cemetery and an archeological hill provide evidence that the community is ancient.

The people derive their livelihoods from animal husbandry, agriculture and use of forest products which provide the basis of a traditional subsistence economy. One of the main items of their diet (wheat flour) is subsidized by government and they purchase rice from the local stores or exchange their beans for rice grown by lowland farmers on the Caspian coastal plain. Villagers and especially women gather a wide variety of non-wood forest products including fruit of plum, medlar, hawthorn and mountain ash, as well as medical and edible plants including rosemary, opium, wild garlic, mint, hogweed, nettle, butter dock and Solomon's seal. These products are used directly by families as well as for sale (particularly Solomon's seal) in local markets for cash income (Avatefi Hemmat and Shamekhi 2006).

Most of agricultural land of the village belonged to the Sinaka family. Some other families purchased part of their land and some families have no agricultural

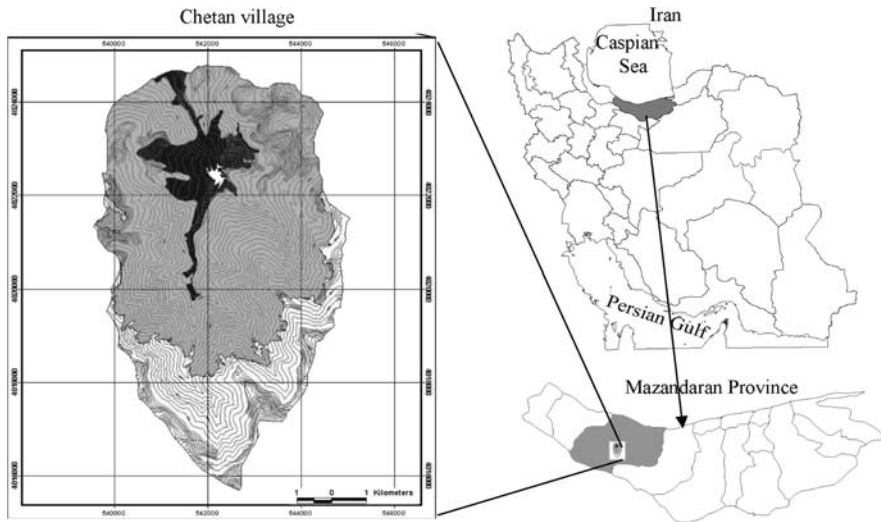


Fig. 1 Location of the study area

land. Based on this ownership situation three main groups of families are recognized in the village. One group consists of farmers; each family has a few small land lots. Their main products are garlic, beans, potatoes, onions and vegetables, produced mainly for their own consumption. Their meadows are located in the valley and contain alluvial sediments which are used to produce grass for domestic livestock that is harvested annually in August and used as fodder in winter. This group usually has a few cows or sheep which use stored fodder in winter and graze in other seasons in the communal forest around agricultural land. A few wealthy families own fruit orchards of cherries, peaches, apples, hazel nuts and walnuts, most of which were established recently. Some villagers work for them as labourers in the harvesting season. The second groups of families mostly have no agricultural land and work as herdsmen in the traditional herding system throughout Nowshahr county (Avatefi Hemmat 2006). There is another small group of families in the village who are herders and keep their own animals. They do transhumance² between the communal forests around the village, where they graze cattle in spring and autumn and alpine pastures where they stay in summer. In winter, the animals are fed in enclosures in the village.

Research Method

Between March 2005 and August 2006, one of the researchers lived intermittently for about 4 months in Chetan village, collecting information about traditional ecological knowledge and forest management of villagers. A qualitative research method was used in this study which was an ethnographic approach focusing on the

² Transhumance is the seasonal moving of livestock to regions of different climate.

Table 1 Distribution of interviews between various groups of informants

Interview	Men	Women	Men and women	Total
In the village				
Individual	58	1	0	59
Group	5	1	2	8
Out of village				
Individual	5	0	0	5
Group	1	0	0	1
Total	69	2	2	73

target society through close field observation and interviews (Spradley and McCurdy 1993, Adib Hajbagheri et al. 2006). A total of 73 semi-structured and open-ended interviews were conducted, following a checklist of guide questions (Table 1). To have some flexibility in conversation with participants, questions were not asked in the same order in all interviews, following up respondent's interests, as recommended by Silverman (2002) and Azkia and Darbane-Astane (2003). People were interviewed in various situations—individually, in groups, and with men and women at different places—such as their workplace and public areas. Individual interviews were carried out, supplemented by household and group interviews and participatory observation of daily activities. Informants were selected through snowball sampling, i.e. by asking villagers about the knowledgeable person in every field of activity and broadening the sampling arena to other informants by asking them to introduce others (following Silverman 2002). Respondents were interviewed multiple times, using information from previous interviews to elicit deeper responses upon re-interview. The informants were from those families whose ancestors owned the village land and other families who paid the royalty to landowners. This kind of chain sampling continued until saturation of information, when further interviews did not yield new information (as described by Strauss and Corbin 1998). As is proposed by Azkia and Darbane-Astane 2003, the survey information was validated with that from group discussions, key informants and participatory observation.

The data from interviews were categorized, and were compared with accessible documents including a historical document of the Sinaka family which was written, signed and sealed three centuries ago by trustworthy persons of the village and annotated and approved several times after that (Sineka Family 1704), an archived court document which was ratified 56 years ago (Ministry of Justice 1951), and a published historical book by Usefineya and Vaez-Tonekaboni 2001, related to west Mazandaran province. Information from these various sources was found to confirm each other more or less. The results of interviews were verified also by interviews with elite and knowledgeable persons of other villages neighboring Chetan village. In these semi-structured interviews, questions were asked in particular about the historical sequence of events, and traditional proprietorship and land management in the villages and in Chetan. One of the informants was especially interesting because the old man was making charcoal in the forests of Chetan village approximately 70 years ago, and confirmed the previous findings.

The policies and events of the post-nationalization period were checked against the officially published laws and regulations of forests and rangelands.

Research Findings

Land proprietorship and management in the village were divided into three main phases. The first phase started about 300 years ago, as the residents reported through stories passed down from their parents and grandparents and supported by old familial documents. The second phase is the period between the Iranian constitutional revolution 1906 and nationalization of forests and pastures of 1963, and the third phase is after nationalization.

Management and Proprietorship immediately following Endowment (1704)

Based on an existing old document, agricultural land, forests and pastures of the community were endowed in 1704, by the brothers Ahmadali and Aliakbar, sons of Ferdous from the family Sinaka, for their male descendants. From then on, the propriety was not private, but was under direction of the Sinaka family, and the benefits were distributed between the male members of the family in perpetuity. No information is available about the number of beneficiaries and the arrangement for distribution of benefits, but Islamic inheritance regulations were usually followed. At that time two other families were living the community, and paid the royalty to this bigger family as follows:

- (1) Farm animals: Each family had a few bovines or sheep to meet their livelihood needs. These animals mainly went out in the morning to graze around the village in the range or forest and returned in the evening. In that structure, the families (Sinaka and others) did not pay for this right.
- (2) Herds of animals: The animals of herder families stayed several months in the forest or rangeland out of village. These areas were divided into several conventional units of grazing parcels, each of which was rented to one or more family, depending on the number of their animals. The rental rate of one unit was a *latar* (48 kg) of butter for each year. Rental land was available for any family which possessed a herd, from the village or from outside the village, and from the Sinaka or other families.
- (3) Agricultural land: All agricultural land was at the disposals of male descendants of the Sinaka family, each of which had personal control of his proper (non-collective) land. The holder had the choice to cultivate himself or to rent the land.
- (4) Wood for construction: The main material for house building and agricultural needs came from the forests. No Sinaka families paid stumpage to exploit the trees. Applicants marked the trees themselves, and then the marked trees were cut and transferred. Payment was made in cash or by butter.
- (5) Fuelwood, fodder and non-wood product of forest: All of these were for current livelihood of families living in the village. The Sinaka families did not

pay for their consumption; whether other families paid depended on occasions, purposes and their relationship with Sinaka families, e.g. there was no payment if the relations were friendly and the products were for use on a common familial occasion such as a wedding or the death of a member of family. Also, there was usually no payment by poor people, or applicants who obtained only a small amount of these products.

- (6) Charcoal: In the past, charcoal was one of the most important products of forests, and charcoal-burning was the traditional occupation of some families who mainly lived outside the village. A part of the forest was divided to parcels (different from grazing parcels), each of which had a kiln for charcoal making. Usually all trees around the kiln were cut except some young trees of favored species and good form. Normally a parcel was clear-cut in a month. The rental price depended on the size of parcel, volume of trees, species, slope and ease of access. For example, early in the 20th century the rental price for a kiln for a month was nearly equivalent one dollar, which was divided between male descendents of the Sinaka family.

Forest Management in the Transition Period (1906–1963)

The administrative, social and economic situations of Iran changed with the constitutional revolution in 1906 (Kasravi, 1977). After about a decade, the waves of changes reached these mountains. This revolution was carried out in the name of modernization, development and establishment of a new structure for the country. The role of central government increased, parliament was created, justice independence was developed and the regular army created. By the waves of revolution, the role of commandants, government chiefs and new powers developed, and a period of destabilization—simultaneously with an effort for centralization—took place. This situation lasted for several decades, during which forest proprietorship was in the hands of persons who had no link with the village.

After constitutional revolution an individual person tyrannically took possession of most forest and pasture land in villages of Kojoor district including Chetan. He was one of commandants of the revolution. His agents gathered taxes from villagers for more than 10 years. After that another wealthy family, from outside the village took possessed via payment or by force of a major part of forest, range, and farm land in the conventional border of Chetan. They also extracted taxes from villagers, mostly in cash. During this time the elite trees of oak and Persian walnut of the village were cut down by new proprietors for export to other countries. In the 1930s, all the village land was purchased by the first king of Pahlavi dynasty, although the villagers were not pleased to sell their land. However, the king did not collect any taxes from the villagers for their use of forests. The second king of Pahlavi returned the land to the villagers, but they had more than 10 years of legal proceeding with the descendents of second family who possessed the village, before taking back their land. In this period both villagers and pretention owners profited from forest and pasture. In 1963 all the

forest and pasture land was nationalized and the agricultural land remained in the hands of Sinaka family.

The Nationalization Movement of 1963 and the Impact of New Orders and Policies on Forest Management

Associated with agrarian reform, forest and range areas were nationalized in 1963, under the *Forests Nationalization Law*. With nationalization, private proprietorship was terminated and the endowed forests and pastures also were nationalized. The ownership of all forest and range was declared public under the administration, and placed under the management responsibility of the Iranian Forests Service. Under the new law, the general policy of government was to allocate Caspian forest for wood production (Forest and Rangeland Organization 1993), but in practice the best forests of 700–1,800 masl were dedicated to wood production and the rest remained in traditional use by herders. Under nationalization, various changes took place in Chetan community that continues up to the present day; these include:

- (1) Farm animal: By nationalization law every family living in forest (out of villages) could have three bovines or 12 sheep (under Article 4 of the nationalization law). The forest service gave them gratis grazing permit for the duration, locality and condition that are appropriate in the nationalized land. With this arrangement the area is not under proprietorship of people, but they have the right of grazing their animals. This right of grazing is not for families living in villages, but these families have some right for their needs of wood. The forest service provides them with their needs (Article 8 of nationalization law) (Forest and Rangeland Organization, 1993).
- (2) Management plan: Some parts of the expropriated forests had been allocated to forest management plans for wood production. These parts were and are contracted to private or public companies or individuals for periods of 10 years. Animal grazing is forbidden in these parts, under the *Protection and Exploitation Law of Forests and Rangelands*.
- (3) Herding of animals: Herding of animals has continued in the forests at high altitude and alpine pastures, The herds generally belong to former proprietors or their leaseholders. These herders must obtain a ‘grazing permit’ or ‘range management permit’ from the forest service, and pay an annual fee for each animal. The number of animals allowed, the duration of grazing and some other conditions are specified in the permit.
- (4) Agricultural land: Just before nationalization of the forest and rangelands, there was agrarian reform and agricultural land became the property of those who worked on the land (Lahsaeizadeh 1990). Most of the irrigated and dryland agriculture remained in the hands of the Sinaka family.
- (5) Wood for construction: Based on the nationalization law, since 1963 the forest service has provided construction timber to meet the needs of families who live in the village, free of charge. The families declare their needs, and the

- forest service investigates the request and if it conforms to regulations, gives the families trees to cut for their needs.
- (6) Fuelwood and other rural wood consumption: By the nationalization law, the residents of village have the right to use fallen or dead trees for their fuelwood and other wood consumption, and if it is not enough, the forest service has to provide their needs from management plans (*Amendment of Article 4 of Protection and Exploitation Law of Forests and Rangelands*).
 - (7) Fodder and non-wood forest products: The people who live in the village have the right to gather fodder and non-wood forest product for their personal livelihood needs.
 - (8) Charcoal production: In management plan implementation, charcoal may be produced from small wood, though it belongs to the manager of the forestry plan. In addition, charcoal may be produced in special circumstances out of management plan implementation, including clear cutting for replanting. In this case, production and distribution is subject to permission of the forest service.

The Present Iranian Forest Policy

The nationalization policies and activities have continued to be applied up to now. Furthermore, from the second quinquennial economic, social and cultural development plan (1994–1999) the government's policy has been to withdraw domestic animal from the Caspian forest with some compensation for loss of the common right (Organization of Plan and Budget 1994). Based on this plan, herders agree to terminate their activities in forests and the forest service pays their right in cash or by cession of some nationalized non-forested land around their region.

In relation to providing wood for construction in the village, fuelwood and wood for charcoal production, the government policy has been to decrease the provision and to replace this wood by other products including iron for construction and subsidized petrol as an energy source, because the forests are not able to provide simultaneously wood for local consumption and industry.

There are also new movements toward rebuilding the past to recognize the people's rights as they were previously. Some policy-makers who support local interests and some environmental NGOs defend this view and believe that it is more participative and environmentally friendly.

What is happening in Chetan is similar to many other villages in the Caspian region and elsewhere in Iran. After nationalization and land reform the regulations moved towards homogenization of forest management and administration, for example for wood provision, domestic animal herding, charcoal production and by-product gathering. Now the orders are similar all over the country, but socio-economic and cultural differences do not permit complete uniformity; for example, withdrawal of domestic animal from the forest is a policy just for Caspian forest, and not for forests of other regions (see Table 2 for outline of these three phases).

Table 2 Historical periods of proprietorship and the changes of policies and management in Chetan village

Situation	Period		
	Custom community 1704–1906	Transition 1906–1963	State ownership 1963–up to now
Kind of ownership	Endowment of all village area	Owners who came out of Chetan	Forest and range was nationalized under the government administration
Policies and management	Farm animals: free for all	1910s: beginning of changes, Taxes for different uses	Farm animal: gratis grazing permit
	Herd animals: with royalty		Herd animals: limited access
	Construction wood: Free for Sinaka family, With royalty for other family	1937: buying of village by first king of Pahlavi dynasty, No taxes and royalty	Wood for construction and firewood: limited quantity
	Fuelwood, fodder and non-wood product of forest: free for Sinaka and for others depend to situation	1947: return of the village's land by second king of Pahlavi. Follow up of legal proceeding. Different uses free of charge for two challenging family	Wood for construction, charcoal making, and grazing: more limitation in recent years
	Charcoal making: with royalty		
Source of power	Agricultural land: own by Sinaka family	1951: returning part of village to the villagers. Agricultural land: own by Sinaka family	Non-wood product of forest: domestic free use Agricultural land: own by Sinaka family
	In the village, Sinaka family	Out of the village and with powerful persons and families	Government

Conclusions

Despite the challenges and difficulties involved in analysis of forest management history at the local level, it is clear that such historical analyses are worthwhile, and should be considered as a required step in the preparation of sustainable development actions (Scotti and Cadoni 2007). In the study area there have been two important phases and a long transition epoch. In the first phase, there was local land management, and decentralized and participative administration, with no regulations from the province or capital of the country. After nationalization, the bureaucratic and private investors came to manage and administer the forest. These changes caused the crisis of identity and development process that is yet to be resolved. Some conclusions can be drawn about the two phases.

Before these policy changes the forests and other land have been administered differently from now and from each other, based on the cultural, socioeconomic and ecological differences between regions. The land area was divided into conventional units, and the production and harvest of these units were in harmony with socioeconomic structure of village and the power of different families.

A number of villages had land endowment under which some areas were endowed for male descendents. Lambton (1998) observed that the noticeable areas of Iran were endowed in the past. According to Islamic law, there are two kind of endowment, namely public and private. The Chetan village was endowed privately, with the endowed property entailed to benefit the descendent of endowers. Soltani Largani (2006) described the private endowment in other villages of Kojur district, near Chetan, and Rostami Atuei (1991) mentioned an endowed village in central Mazandaran province. One of the main reasons for endowing land was deterioration in private proprietorship owing to lack of security. Many private endowments were established to protect this property from usurpation (Lambton 1998; Amid 2002). This could be the case in Chetan, where the owner hoped to keep their property secure and prevent confiscating, because the endowment had been done near to the end of Safavid dynasty (1501–1736) when Iran experienced instability. Furthermore, by endowment, there was a special mode of ownerships and management that was not private and the benefits belonged to a family over generations, so there was some distribution of benefits. Usually in this mode of management, a kind of common property regime was carried out which helped to protect resources and prevent open access.

The policies and activities practiced were based on the traditional local knowledge over generations. All decision-making was around the landlord with a group of elders and sages, so the inhabitants of villages had participation and were involved in the village affairs.

After constitutional revolution the structure of society changed. This change had an impact on forests through changes in proprietorship over several decades (see Table 2), but the basic law about forests did not change; after normalization of the situation, ownership and management moved towards the antecedent situation and some members of the Sinaka family could procure their forests and other land again.

In 1963 with nationalization of forests, simultaneously there were two national changes of policy, namely private proprietorship and endowment were abolished, and the new policy of the forest service (under the *Forests Nationalization Law*) projected to have forest management plans with the goal of wood production and consequently animal elimination. In this phase, execution of government policy brought in the budget and expertise of the forest service, what was not possible for local powers to bring. This could produce a quick mutation for local and regional development, but it did not give the intended results because its operators did not originate from the region and a dynamic situation of internal development was not created. The centralized policy implemented by Forest, Range and Watershed Management Organization ignored traditional village system including knowledge, customs and practices of local communities, gained over many years and in harmony with local culture and environment. The traditional village system helps to sustain production of multiple goods and services providing livelihood security and quality of life (Elbakidze and Angelstam 2007). With a weakening role of local stakeholders and owners of forest and woodland in management, traditional ecological knowledge related with them was ignored, though emphasized by researchers (Berkes 1993; Moller et al. 2004; Kaschula, et al. 2005; Scotti and Cadoni 2007; Johann 2007; Ramakrishnan 2007).

The success of a policy depends on the active role of all stakeholders. If the forest policy fails to address this matter adequately, it may be rejected by the stakeholders and may end in a crisis. This could be a challenge to policy-makers, because the various interest groups could have conflicting ideas and schedules, which may or may not provide room for negotiation (Muhammed et al. 2008). This is the case in the nationalization of 1963 which made fundamental change and did not pay sufficient attention to the historical and local situation; policy-making was top-down, without any intervention of local people. The direction of forest management plans generally belongs to public or private industries or companies that do not have their origin in the local community or even in the region, so the major part of the benefits of resource use go out of the community. As the proprietorship and management was took back from rural families, their motivation for forest conservation decreased and the number of infractions increased, for example with development of the road network and communication systems the quantity of wood traffic increased and there are many conflicts that continue to present time. These have intensified forest degradation, which is unfavorable to the villagers' lives. As noted by Scotti and Cadoni (2007), the socio-cultural dimensions of forest management over time are more than just an aspect of common forest; it is part of the essence of these resources. The wise policy-making process for natural resources in an area which has a long history of traditional practices needs historical analyses as fundamental input. It can reveal potential conflicting opinions of the various stakeholders and resolve these to gain the aim of management.

It is notable that, with change of policy in the Caspian forest toward wood production, the forest service has not provided the necessary education and extension program to bring the people along with their policies. Former proprietors own their agricultural land and until recently continued to have their herds in the forests, but now with development of forest management plans they cannot continue with animal grazing. Farm animals continue their presence, but they face difficulties to continue. Herds of animals continue grazing in forests in spite of execution of management plans; here also government management has not been successful. Now villagers and herders have to stop animal herding and search for paid work as labourers in forest management or other jobs, sometimes far from their village.

After the Islamic revolution of 1979 the new constitution recognized the nationalization law of 1963. According to the new constitution natural resources including forests and pastures are public property and are administrated by government, similar to under the nationalization law of 1963; therefore, the principles of policies and regulations of forests and pastures have not changed.

A final conclusion is that greater emphasis should be placed on studies of traditional knowledge, because local management of forest and pasture has its foundation in rural people's knowledge, and at present time many of their aspects are unclear. It is essential to study the historical context of the formulated policies to make possible use of the aspects of traditional knowledge, that is, to conform to the actual socio-economic situation. In that time Iranian national policies shall be more successful in execution with more effective progress towards the goal of forest conservation.

Acknowledgments The authors are grateful to Dr. Steve Harrison for his patience, valuable comments and helpful suggestions that improved the draft very much; they acknowledge also two referees for their wise advice. Also they will never forget the kindness and hospitality of Chetan villagers.

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